



1929 Parade —Submitted by Valorie Cummings



1929 Parade —Submitted by Valorie Cummings

Do You Have Tips For Safely Installing Outdoor Christmas Lights?

ANSWER BY RICHARD BEARD
SU Extension Agricultural
Engineering Specialist

The Christmas season is upon us, and outdoor decorations are being purchased and unpacked with anticipation. The holidays are enhanced by exterior lighting, but it is important to exercise caution when selecting and installing them.

Each year, holiday lighting contributes to injuries caused by electrical shock, falls and fires. Holiday lighting fires annually cause property damage in excess of \$16 million. Consider the following to avoid injury as you decorate for the holidays:

- When purchasing outdoor Christmas lighting, look for labels marked with UL or ETL. This indicates the product has been tested by an independent laboratory recognized by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Outdoor lights with these labels satisfy the minimum standards for product safety.

- When selecting lights for exterior installation, be sure the packaging states that it is designed for outdoor use. Outdoor lighting is weatherproof and designed for temporary operation in harsh winter weather. Do not purchase used Christmas lights or lighting not in the original package.

- When selecting outdoor lights, consider purchasing lights with miniature, low-heat producing bulbs. These lights require less amperage and are less likely to overload electrical outlets.

circuit interrupter (GFCI). Portable outdoor GFCIs can be purchased at hardware stores if this circuit protection is not available.

- Purchase appropriately sized timers to automatically turn lights on and off. Lights should be turned off when people are not present and they should not be left on overnight.

- If extension cords are required for outdoor lights, use those designed for outdoor use with three-prong plugs. Never use an indoor cord or a cord without the third prong. Plug the cord into a grounded outlet and select a cord with the shortest length that works for your project. Do not use a 100-foot extension cord for a 10-foot distance. Keep outdoor electrical connections above the ground and out of the snow and water. If extension cords must cross walkways, tape them down.

- Check the manufacturer's guidelines to determine the number of light strings that may be safely plugged together. If the packaging does not indicate the number, connect no more than three light strings together.

- Securely attach outdoor light strings to buildings, trees or other objects to prevent displacement by wind or other weather conditions. When possible, point the lamp sockets down to avoid moisture buildup and do not operate light strings with missing bulbs.

- Unplug outdoor lights when replacing bulbs so there is no danger of shock. Reduce damage to lights by handling them carefully when installing and removing them and when

same electrical outlet. Electrical outlets and timers used for Christmas lights should be readily accessible for quick disconnection or adjustment as necessary.

- When installing lights, be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's instructions. These instructions should be stored with the lights and referred to when purchasing replacement bulbs and on future installations.

- Before installing newly purchased or previously used Christmas lighting, plug the string in and make sure all the bulbs operate properly. When unpacking outdoor lights used during previous years, carefully inspect them for frayed, loose or bare wires and damaged bulbs or sockets. Discard damaged light strings.

- One of the greatest dangers when installing outdoor lighting involves the use of ladders. Use a high-quality, sturdy ladder that is the proper height. Be sure it is securely positioned. To avoid falls, move the ladder rather than leaning on it from side to side.

- When installing outdoor lights, use screw-in hooks or other fasteners that will not damage the insulation on the lighting strings. Nails and staple guns can easily cut or damage insulation and conductors.

- Refer to the manufacturer's guidelines to determine the recommended spacing for supports and the maximum span allowed for the light string. Christmas lights are generally designed to span distances of only a few feet and should be supported at